

Applicants: Gérard Hascoët and Thierry Pechoux
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Amendments to the Claims:

Please cancel Claims 1-17 without prejudice or disclaimer, and add new Claims 18-53 as set forth below.

1-17. (Canceled)

18. (New) A device for protecting an intracorporeal probe, comprising:

(a) a probe cover comprising a hollow tube of flexible material configured and dimensioned for application over an intracorporeal probe, wherein the tube is closed at one end and open at its other end, and wherein the probe cover contains an impedance-matching medium; and

(b) a cover protector comprising a hollow tubular protective element arranged for application over the probe cover such that at least a portion of the probe cover is inserted into the cover protector, wherein the protective element is open at both ends.

19. (New) The device of Claim 18, wherein the impedance-matching medium is an acoustic impedance-matching medium.

20. (New) The device of Claim 18, wherein the impedance-matching medium is disposed substantially at the closed end of the probe cover.

21. (New) The device of Claim 18, wherein the cover protector further comprises means for facilitating insertion of the probe cover into the cover protector, wherein the means for facilitating insertion comprise a flexible coupling mounted on that one of the open ends of the cover protector that is adjacent to the closed end of the probe cover, so as to enable temporary suction to be established between the probe cover and the cover protector at the closed end of the probe cover.

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22. (New) The device of Claim 18, wherein the cover protector comprises a plurality of means for establishing localized regions of contact between the cover protector and the probe cover, wherein the plurality of means comprise internal ridges disposed substantially parallel to the longitudinal axis of the protective element of the cover protector.

23. (New) The device of Claim 18, wherein the probe cover is folded back over the cover protector at the end of the cover protector that is remote from the closed end of the probe cover.

24. (New) The device of Claim 18, wherein the cover protector further comprises means for holding the probe cover substantially against the inner wall of the protective element of the cover protector.

25. (New) The device of Claim 18, wherein the cover protector is packaged in a sterilizable, sealed package that is at least partially transparent.

26. (New) The device of Claim 18, further comprising an intracorporeal probe.

27. (New) The device of Claim 26, wherein the probe cover is of a length sufficient to cover an outside surface of the intracorporeal probe.

28. (New) The device of Claim 26, wherein the intracorporeal probe has an ultrasound measuring element.

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29. (New) The device of Claim 18, wherein the flexible material of the probe cover is selected from the group consisting of silicone, natural rubber, and synthetic rubber.

30. (New) A method of fitting a probe cover on an intracorporeal probe, the probe cover comprising a hollow tube of flexible material configured and dimensioned for application over the intracorporeal probe, wherein the tube is closed at one end and open at its other end, wherein at least a portion of the probe cover is inserted into a cover protector comprising a hollow tubular protective element arranged for application over the probe cover, wherein the protective element is open at both ends, and wherein a plug rod is inserted into the probe cover, the method comprising:

- a) coupling the protective element of the cover protector to a vacuum pump;
- b) establishing a vacuum inside the protective element adjacent to the closed end of the probe cover within a closed space as defined between the cover, the vacuum pump, and the protective element;
- c) withdrawing the plug rod from the probe cover while the vacuum is maintained;
- d) inserting the intracorporeal probe into the probe cover;
- e) eliminating the vacuum; and
- f) withdrawing the intracorporeal probe with the probe cover mounted thereon from the cover protector.

31. (New) The method of Claim 30, wherein the probe is an esophageal probe, a urethral probe, a rectal probe, or a blood vessel probe.

32. (New) The method of Claim 30, wherein the probe cover contains an impedance-matching medium.

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33. (New) The method of Claim 32, wherein the impedance-matching medium is an acoustic impedance-matching medium.

34. (New) The method of Claim 32, wherein the impedance-matching medium is disposed substantially at the closed end of the probe cover.

35. (New) The method of Claim 30, wherein the cover protector further comprises means for facilitating insertion of the probe cover into the cover protector, wherein the means for facilitating insertion comprise a flexible coupling mounted on that one of the open ends of the cover protector that is adjacent to the closed end of the probe cover, so as to enable temporary suction to be established between the probe cover and the cover protector at the closed end of the probe cover.

36. (New) The method of Claim 30, wherein the cover protector comprises a plurality of means for establishing localized regions of contact between the cover protector and the probe cover, wherein the plurality of means comprise internal ridges disposed substantially parallel to the longitudinal axis of the protective element of the cover protector.

37. (New) The method of Claim 30, wherein the probe cover is folded back over the cover protector at the end of the cover protector that is remote from the closed end of the probe cover.

38. (New) The method of Claim 30, wherein the cover protector further comprises means for holding the probe cover substantially against the inner wall of the protective element of the cover protector.

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39. (New) The method of Claim 30, wherein the cover protector is sterilized.

40. (New) The method of Claim 30, wherein the cover protector is packaged in a sterilizable, sealed package that is at least partially transparent.

41. (New) The method of Claim 30, wherein the probe cover is of a length sufficient to cover an outside surface of the intracorporeal probe.

42. (New) The method of Claim 30, wherein the intracorporeal probe has an ultrasound measuring element.

43. (New) The method of Claim 30, wherein the flexible material of the probe cover is selected from the group consisting of silicone, natural rubber, and synthetic rubber.

44. (New) A method of making a device for protecting an intracorporeal probe that comprises a probe cover, comprising a hollow tube of flexible material configured and dimensioned for application over an intracorporeal probe, wherein the tube is closed at one end and open at its other end, and a cover protector, comprising a hollow tubular protective element arranged for application over the probe cover such that at least a portion of the probe cover is inserted into the cover protector, wherein the protective element is open at both ends, the method comprising:

a) preparing the probe cover by cutting a portion of flexible tube from a reel on which the tube is wound, which portion serves to constitute the cover, and by sealing one end of the portion;

b) inserting the probe cover into the protective element of the cover protector, and folding the probe cover back over the cover protector at the end of the cover protector that is remote from the closed end of the probe cover; and

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c) inserting an impedance-matching medium inside the cover.

45. (New) The method of Claim 44, wherein suction is established outside the cover prior to inserting the impedance-matching medium into the cover, after which the suction is eliminated.

46. (New) The method of Claim 44, further comprising packaging the device with a cutting tool for cutting the cover.

47. (New) The method of Claim 44, wherein the impedance-matching medium is an acoustic impedance-matching medium.

48. (New) The method of Claim 44, wherein the impedance-matching medium is disposed substantially at the closed end of the probe cover.

49. (New) The method of Claim 44, wherein the cover protector further comprises means for facilitating insertion of the probe cover into the cover protector, wherein the means for facilitating insertion comprise a flexible coupling mounted on that one of the open ends of the cover protector that is adjacent to the closed end of the probe cover, so as to enable temporary suction to be established between the probe cover and the cover protector at the closed end of the probe cover.

50. (New) The method of Claim 44, wherein the cover protector comprises a plurality of means for establishing localized regions of contact between the cover protector and the probe cover, wherein the plurality of means comprise internal ridges disposed substantially parallel to the longitudinal axis of the protective element of the cover protector.

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51. (New) The method of Claim 44, wherein the cover protector further comprises means for holding the probe cover substantially against the inner wall of the protective element of the cover protector.

52. (New) The method of Claim 44, wherein the device is packaged in a sterilizable, sealed package that is at least partially transparent.

53. (New) The method of Claim 44, wherein the flexible material of the probe cover is selected from the group consisting of silicone, natural rubber, and synthetic rubber.